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Communist Party in Power in Indian States

A Study of the Promise of New Society in the Context of the Bourgeois Liberal Social System

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(SUMMARY)

THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE KANPUR UNIVERSITY, KANPUR (U.P.), INDIA,
FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF THE AWARD OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

Pulluru Eashvaraiah

M. Phil (Osm)

I C S S R Doctoral Fellow

Under the Guidance of
Professor

Bhupendra Kumar Joshi

Ph. D (Hawaii)

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THE GIRI INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
SECTOR 'O' ALIGANJ, LUCKNOW. 226 020 (INDIA)
NOVEMBER 1985

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AS IN PRIVATE LIFE ONE DISTINGUISHES FROM
WHAT HE REALLY IS AND DOES, STILL MORE IN
HISTORICAL STRUGGLES MUST ONE DISTINGUISH THE
PHRASES AND FANCIES OF THE PARTIES FROM THEIR
REAL ORGANISM AND THEIR REAL INTERESTS, THEIR
CONCEPTION OF THEMSELVES FROM THEIR REALITY.

- KARL MARX

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(iii)

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(iv)

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Whatever are the view points expressed by all those with whom I held discussions and dialogues, I am alone responsible for the omissions and omissions in the way I have interpreted the issues involved in this work.

P. EASHVARAH

One of the central issues in present day Marxist politics concerns the problems and prospects of communist parties achieving revolution by coming to power at provincial and national levels through electoral methods. Starting with the assumption that the analysis of such experiments in India, particularly the characterisation of the politics of CPI and CPI (M) has been inadequate, the present study has addressed itself to some related questions, especially the performance of the Communist parties while in power since 1957 in Kerala and West Bengal on the agrarian front in the context of the opportunities and constraints of the bourgeois liberal political system that exists in India and in relation to the advancement of Communist movement in terms of the ultimate goal of establishing a socialist society.

In part one, I have dealt with some methodological and theoretical issues. I have adopted primarily an interpretative and analytical method in the specific contextual perspective, thus avoiding any hypothesis derived from an overarching theory in the widely used positivist sense of the term. I have emphasised instead the need to understand the social and political processes which condition the performance of Communist parties at the state level with particular reference to Kerala and West Bengal in the context of their geographical and land tenurial specificities. The discussion on theoretical issues involved in the analysis of Communist parties coming to power has centered around the following lines.

The central question in this regard is the base-superstructure relation and its various interpretations after Marx. I have focussed on what role the state and social and political institutions play in the revolutionary process, if primacy of the economic factor, as indicated by Marx, is taken for granted. I have considered the views of classical Marxists like Plekhanov and ~~Marx~~ like C. Wright Mills followed by a critique of the base-superstructure

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relation as presented by Marx and other Marxists like Carl Boggs and Barry Hindess. While Carl Boggs questioned the consideration of economic factor as the dominant one pointing to the contribution made by Gramsci towards building a theory of superstructure, Barry Hindess has questioned the basis of base-superstructure imagery for the formulation of programme and forms of struggle, particularly those of parliamentary and representative institutions.

Further, I have considered Lenin's theory of imperialism and finance capital and its implications for revolution in the colonies and dominions; Trotsky's theory of 'Permanent Revolution' and the concept of world revolution which specified the limitations of revolution in a single country or a few countries; Gramsci's revolutionary theory of superstructure in which he was critical of the revolutionary process being considered as a basically politico-economic one and proposed an alternative embodied in his concept of 'cultural hegemony' of the proletariat and subaltern classes; Mao's ~~signification~~ of Marxism and the relevance of the theory and practice of Maoism and the recent developments in China to Third World countries.

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While discussing the Marxist Praxis in relation to parliamentary democracy, I have focussed on the basic propositions of leading figures in what is known as Marxist reformism in Germany, i.e., Bernstein and Kautsky and a critique of this major trend which emerged after the first International, particularly by Lenin. This is followed by a discussion of Lenin's alternative strategy and tactics particularly in relation to revolutionary utilization of parliaments and other representative institutions wherein he was critical of both reformists who advocated exclusive reliance on parliamentary struggles and 'Left Communists' who advocated complete boycott of parliamentary and representative institutions. While analysing the theoretical and political propositions of Luxemburg, I have discussed her criticism of organisational principles and her theory

of spontaneity and mass strike. This is followed by an examination of her position on Communist participation in bourgeois parliaments and formation of governments by Communist parties in alliance with bourgeois political parties.

I have concluded by arguing that the political activity of the left parties working in a bourgeois liberal political system, particularly participation in elections, formation of alliances and governments at provincial and national levels is not alien to Marxist political practice. What is required is a cautious and creative application of such tactics with a long run strategy of revolution irrespective of the immediate successes and failures. Such a strategy involving patient and protracted struggles not only in economic and electoral terms but also cultural and ideological ones which affect the patterns of consciousness and help towards building a proletarian cultural hegemony, as Gramsci would have us believe, will be of immense use in advancing the revolutionary cause and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, extra-parliamentary struggles, while tactically using parliamentary means, offer better opportunities of taking advantage of revolutionary situations such as those presented by the emergency and post emergency situations in India. In the examination of the programmes, perspectives of revolution and performance of the CPI and CPI (M) in the last few decades I have concluded that the parties lack this kind of direction. The way they have been working side tracks the class struggle and sinks them in the morass of reformist politics although it puts them in the saddle of power. As a result they have not been able to come out of the dilemma of social democratic and reformist politics viz-a-viz revolutionary reformism.

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The second part of my study deals with the analysis of the performance of left parties in terms of their electoral success and revolutionary advance in Kerala and West Bengal with special reference to land reforms. I have considered land reforms an important issue because: (1) The left parties consider, and rightly so, agrarian mobilisation as the axis of revolution particularly in the context of India. (2) The policy and implementation process and the potentiality of the issues of land reforms both in securing certain benefits to the exploited poor working on land and in bringing to the fore the limitations of the overall system can be fruitfully studied to highlight the theoretical perspectives of left parties.

The examination of the land reforms policy of the CPI and CPI(M) and their performance while in power particularly in implementing the land reforms policy of the Congress party is logical and has led to certain conclusions having a theoretical bearing much in line with the thrust of the discussion in part one. The left parties in India have not made a revolutionary use of the issue around the land problem by conscientising the exploited agrarian classes on revolutionary lines. While they have not lagged behind in radicalising the bourgeois land reforms programme by using electoral opportunities provided by the bourgeois liberal political system, they have not oriented the classes concerned towards dispelling their parliamentary illusions. The emphasis in the implementation of land reforms has been more and more on achieving the physical targets keeping in view the electoral implications and the impact of populist policies on the survival of left parties in power. Governmental action relying on the administrative machinery has sidetracked the radical politics of mobilisation of exploited agrarian classes particularly on issues like bringing

the plantation sector forest and various kinds of waste lands fisheries etc., within the purview of land reforms and on issues like co-operativisation and collectivisation for promoting socialist political consciousness. Whatever radical political content the process of implementation may have it has been overshadowed by the role of the bureaucracy.

The constitutional and judicial constraints have also been dealt with in a bureaucratic manner. This measures like the creation of special cells for dealing with cases in favour of the expected beneficiaries and multi-class committees at local, district and state levels and special programmes like 'Operation Barga' have dominated the scene.

The dilemma for the Communist parties in this respect has also been whether to be strictly constitutionalist or to go beyond constitutionalism by initiating struggles on such issues like non co-operation of the centre and judicial obstacles. While the former strategy bestows legitimacy on the party, the latter however works against the legitimacy of the party but bestows it with revolutionary fervour. A creative combination of both could alone have helped the parties in making revolutionary strides. However, the effect of embourgeoisement of the whole process of land reforms prevents the evolution of such a strategy.

This has happened in Kerala wherein the beneficiaries of tenancy reforms became rich and found themselves in opposition to the agricultural labourers. In West Bengal the over all dominance of rich peasants at the leadership levels in prevents the party from waging struggles of the landless and the land poor beyond constitutional limits. On the other hand the promise of change and development and the need to avert crises so as to survive in power, oblige the parties to compromise their ideological concerns which had only served the interests of the bourgeoisie and the landlords.

In the end I have brought in the distinction between agrarian reform and agrarian revolution in relation to Marxist theory and practice. Land Reforms initiated by the State in a bourgeois society comprises a series of phases starting from policy declaration to actual benefits accruing to the intended beneficiaries. The whole policy subserves the bourgeoisie as a whole and does not promote any basic transformation in the social set up. The industrial bourgeoisie is also be interested in such a reform which may sound radical,

Agrarian revolution on the other hand consists of peasants seizing the lands of large landowners which amounts to the rejection of normal bureaucratic, judicial procedures as also adoption of new procedures that favour the intended beneficiaries. The whole process subserves revolution in the ultimate sense of the term.

The strategies and tactics of communist parties on the agrarian front within the framework of partisan struggles have been justified by leaders like Hare Krishna Konar and Promod. Das Gupta during the period of the United Front Governments of 1967 and 1969 in West Bengal and 1971 in Kerala. They have compared the Congress Government in India with the tsarist despotic government in Russia. But the arguments of Lenin on the situation in Russia have been separated from the overall strategy. For Lenin the crucial thing was the establishment of peasant Soviets even during the bourgeois democratic stage of revolution and not relying on such weak forms of governments like United Fronts and Left Fronts which emerge out of the game of electoral alliances. Whatever be the radical content in the strategy and tactics, this reformist character of Marxist political practice overshadows these limitations, while it is clear that peasants required a thorough going bourgeois revolution and not by way of reforms. The way of reform is one

of delay, procrastination and a painfully slow decomposition of the organism. The revolutionary path is one of rapid amputation which is the least painful to the proletariat and the peasantry. The constraints of the bourgeois political system in the context of societies like India as have been highlighted in the study only point to the correctness of the above perspective.